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SUBJECT: JUNBESH OFFICIAL EXPOUNDS ON PARTY REFORM, PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTION OUTLOOK

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Junbesh party central committee head Sayed Noorullah discussed his recent public spat with General Dostum, internal party reform efforts, and the party's outlook for the upcoming presidential elections with State PRT officer. Anti-reform elements within Junbesh, especially former military commanders, will slowly come around to seeing the advantages of party reforms, Noorullah predicted. He envisaged that the three main contenders for the presidency will be President Karzai, former Interior Minister Ali Jalali, and former U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad - all Pashtuns. Junbesh's negotiations with the ethnic Hazara Wahdat party have hit a snag over which of their parties should nab the second vice-presidency should they reach a deal with one or more of the leading candidates. Noorullah mentioned that he has rebuffed offers of support for Junbesh from Iranian government sources. He believes Karzai should resign upon the expiration of his term in May but does not want a state of emergency declared in the country as a result. Noorullah also described the behind-the-scenes efforts by Labor and Social Affairs Minister Noor Qarqin to protect his own political future by manipulating the ethnic Turkmen vote.

RELATIONS WITH DOSTUM STILL STRAINED

¶2. (SBU) A confident, relaxed Sayed Noorullah acknowledged to State PRT officer on February 11 that his dust-up with Dostum was the result of tensions that had been mounting between the two men after the party congress last spring. According to Noorullah, Dostum is "not well" psychologically, and believes Noorullah is the architect of the plan to send Dostum to Turkey for alcoholism treatment. Asked whether he will have to tread more carefully in pushing his reform agenda, Noorullah observed that the Junbesh steering committee has come to realize that Junbesh cannot revolve forever around Dostum. The steering committee will consult with Dostum, but not allow him alone to shape the party's destiny. Noorullah said the Junbesh steering committee has come to understand how debilitating alcoholism has been to Dostum's judgment. "Dostum's thinking is static. We need dynamic changes within the party," he said. Noorullah did not speculate on when Dostum might return to Afghanistan, but said he would come back "tomorrow" if the doctors let him, and if that were to happen, it would bring trouble.

NOORULLAH TRYING TO WIN OVER ANTAGONISTS WITHIN PARTY

¶3. (SBU) Dostum has not been the only obstacle to reform; Junbesh's ex-commanders, particularly MPs from Faryab province like Fatiullah Khan and Ahmed Khan "Sarhowz," also have shown resistance to making the party more democratic. "Junbesh is a party born of war, and many of the commanders still have that mentality," Noorullah explained. He added that they feel "if Dostum's role is diminished,

so will theirs be." Calling the group of anti-reform elements in Junbesh who are opposed to his leadership "fanatics," Noorullah said that even some of its members, which he claims consists of 10-15 young "hotheads" from Faryab, have softened their stance toward him lately. As for the Junbesh MPs who refuse to buy in to the party's reform agenda, Junbesh will not support their parliamentary reelection bids next year. Noorullah said he has been spending a lot of time meeting influential party members individually to explain the importance of the reform plans. "One way or another, they'll change eventually," he believes.

JUNBESH'S OUTLOOK FOR THE ELECTIONS

14. (SBU) Junbesh is busy mobilizing its supporters but has not yet publicly settled on a candidate. Noorullah described a few scenarios for his party in the upcoming presidential election. In his opinion, the best course of action for Junbesh is to negotiate favorable terms independently with one or more candidates. If that proves too difficult, Junbesh will try to conclude alliances with other parties and leverage its collective strength to cut deals with one or more candidates. The third option for Junbesh is to run its own candidate, but Noorullah concedes that is unlikely to happen. Noorullah predicted the party will settle on a candidate within a month's time.

SEEKING THE SECOND-VICE-PRESIDENCY

15. (SBU) Junbesh's main condition for lending its support to a candidate is receiving the second vice-presidency should that person win. (Note: Noorullah, clearly expecting the next president to be a Pashtun, believes the first vice-presidency will be given to an ethnic Tajik.) That remains the sticking point in Junbesh's talks with the ethnic Hazara Wahdat party, which is also eyeing the second

vice-presidency as a pre-condition for its support. Discussions with other parties, like the Afghan Millat party (Pashtun majority) are taking place at a low level. Junbesh membership in the United National Front (UF) is a dead issue, as far as Noorullah is concerned. Before his recent trip to Turkey to meet Dostum, Noorullah said he met with UF chairman Rabbani and told him not to count Junbesh as a UF member anymore, even though Junbesh may continue to attend UF meetings. Noorullah suggested that Junbesh may even hold discussions with influential Jamiat party figure Governor Atta of Balkh province, noting what he called Atta's dissatisfaction with Rabbani's UF. (Note: Atta is his own man and has previously remarked to State PRT officer that he does not feel bound by decisions of the UF.)

SIZING UP POTENTIAL PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDERS

16. (SBU) Looking at the potential field of presidential candidates, Noorullah expects the strongest contenders to be Pashtun. He believes that Karzai, despite his loss of standing with the international community, could still be a formidable contender, especially if he remains as president until the August elections. District and provincial government appointees, hoping to keep their jobs, may feel compelled to conduct campaign outreach on Karzai's behalf. Noorullah is clearly keen about the prospects of former U.S. Ambassador Khalilizad should he enter the race - Noorullah claims Khalilizad already has people laying the groundwork for his campaign. But he is less keen about the chances of former Interior Minister Ali Jalali, unless Khalilizad decides to back him. Noorullah dismissed the prospects of First Vice-President Ahmad Zia Massoud, who he claimed will be UF's candidate, and scoffed at the UF's "Obama-like vision" in thinking that an ethnic Tajik could be elected president in majority Pashtun Afghanistan.

REBUFFING IRAN'S OFFER OF SUPPORT

17. (SBU) Noorullah mentioned that during the internal party turmoil last December and January, Iranian government sources contacted him about lending their support to Junbesh. Noorullah said he refused to entertain the offer and sent a clear signal to them that Junbesh does not want Iranian support.

JUNBESH: KARZAI SHOULD STEP DOWN WHEN TERM ENDS IN MAY

18. (SBU) Noorullah noted that Junbesh would air a statement on

party-owned Aina TV, to inform supporters about the party's election preparations and to call on the government to take appropriate measures to fill the "legal vacuum" created if President Karzai refuses to step down when his term ends in May. In Noorullah's view, Karzai should resign and Upper House Speaker Mojadeddi should be named interim leader. But the August elections should not be preceded by a state of emergency - a measure proposed by some MPs. Noorullah warned that conducting a campaign against such a backdrop would be a setback for the country and could result in undemocratic elections.

MINISTER QARQIN'S TURKMEN "GAME"

¶9. (SBU) Asked what he made of reports circulating among ethnic Turkmen communities that Engineer Rosi Guildi Khojayhen, an MP from Shortepa district in Balkh province, would be their candidate for president, Noorullah grinned and said that was all a "game" being rigged by Labor and Social Affairs Minister Noor Qarqin - an ethnic Turkmen - to ensure Qarqin's political future. Many Turkmens say they feel betrayed by Qarqin because he has not brought any development to their communities, most of which are situated along the Amu Darya river. (Note: The head of the education department in the ethnic Turkmen district of Kaldar in Balkh province told State PRT officer a few days earlier that even he - an ethnic Turkmen whose father is Qarqin's cousin - will support Khojayhen.)

¶10. (SBU) As Noorullah explained it, Qarqin, realizing he has lost support, is using Khojayhen as a tool by propping him up as the face of the Turkmen bloc. The plan is the old bait-and-switch: Khojayhen runs for president, bows out of the race, cuts a deal with a leading candidate, encourages Turkmen voters to support that candidate, and later, along with Qarqin, reaps the political spoils. The Council of Turkmens in Kabul has reportedly blessed Khojayhen's presidential bid, and according to Noorullah, Khojayhen and Qarqin have already discussed this plan with Karzai. (Note: Qarqin is believed to have carried about half the Turkmen vote for Karzai in the last election.) Yet Qarqin's opportunism will push him to correct course if needed and to throw his weight behind whichever candidate appears to be the front runner, opined Noorullah, who added that "there will

be at least one ethnic Turkmen minister in the cabinet no matter who becomes president and Qarqin wants to be that minister." Noorullah believes Khojayhen, an ex-Junbesh commander, lacks sufficient capacity to hold a ministerial portfolio much less serve as president. Despite these political machinations, Noorullah remains confident Junbesh will attract the majority of the Turkmen vote, and points to well-attended party shuras in Turkmen communities in Badghis and Faryab provinces as an indication of their support. By its own estimates, Junbesh claims it captured half the Turkmen vote in the last presidential election, and it believes it can pick up another quarter of the vote next time.

COMMENT

¶11. (SBU) Noorullah did not drop any clues as to whom Junbesh would support for president. But his criticism of Karzai was much sharper during this exchange than it was two months ago, making it seem unlikely that Junbesh will cut a deal to support Karzai. Nor did Noorullah sound optimistic that a deal would be struck with the Wahdat party. Noorullah's deputy in Faryab province, when asked by State PRT officer in early February if he and other Junbesh party officials could rally supporters to vote for Karzai if a deal were to be struck with the president, admitted that they could not and said such a move would undermine their credibility.

¶12. (SBU) Noorullah realizes he will have to put on a charm offensive to build trust among Dostum's stalwart supporters given the party's recent internal spat. As a Turkish diplomat remarked to State PRT officer, charisma is one quality the dour Noorullah - a former intelligence operative - lacks. One card that is his to play for the foreseeable future is Turkey's support for Junbesh party reforms. For Dostum, coming to terms with the realization that his is not the only voice shaping the party's future may be even more bitter a pill to swallow than having to follow a 12-step program. It is fair to say that Noorullah achieved a minor victory by being reinstated as the party's central committee chairman despite

Dostum's having stripped him of that title. Officially, Dostum remains the party's leader, one who is still held in very high esteem by many. As the Junbesh party chairman in Faryab province remarked, insulting Dostum in Faryab is an offense more serious than insulting a religious leader. An uneasy truce between their respective camps prevails, but by Noorullah's account, the Junbesh steering committee is behind him more now than it was two months ago when the rift emerged.

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